

Outline, Week 7

Second half of *Villette*

Readings

- Charlotte Bronte, *Villette* (second half)
- Sharon Marcus, *Between Women*, Introduction and Chapter 2
- Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, “Surface Reading: An Introduction”
- William Cohen, “Why Is There So Much French in *Villette*?”

Talking about the Readings

- Selections from Sharon Marcus’s *Between Women*
- We have two(!) summaries from Laura and Sagnik to work with!
- In what ways are Marcus’s frameworks useful, especially in context or dialogue with others we’ve encountered earlier this semester?
 - Unpacking whether we really understand “the social relationship” (14) and how this contrasts with Foucault/Miller and previous reading and, more broadly, “just reading” versus “symptomatic reading”
- Underpinning Marcus’s argument is also an argument about history and historical relationship with the text. I’m not contesting this contextualization/reference to history, in fact I think it’s the most critical and interesting part of their argument, especially as it responds to other (historical) readings of Victorian novels, but I wonder whether inside the logic behind “just reading” lies an implicit “symptomatic” argument about representation (historical representation and realism) worth unpacking? (this is perhaps not all that productive, but I’m curious about it nonetheless)
 - Underpinning this is another question I’ve had more broadly this semester about “aesthetics” (which I know nothing about) but both the “aesthetic” effect and creation of that effect of symbolism, moral judgments, subjectivity...
 - Maybe a more concrete example of this, following up the Underwood from last week, landscape descriptions which we so commonly “symptomatically” read as erotically charged or recalling Jameson’s “barometer” ... but also as they tap into forms of how such a scene is set up? (I’m not sure I have the theoretical toolbox to suggest an alternative haha)
 - And with the above, maybe a bit more in the spirit of things like “narrative matrix” that Marcus posits on page 79?

- Laura and Sagnik are both skeptical (as am I)! Perhaps we should mark these discontents and then (re)visit the respective passages later on?
- More on Surface Reading!
- “A surface is what insists on being looked *at* rather than what we must train ourselves to see *through*.” (9)
- Keton can I call on you to briefly run through the Best and Marcus?
- “Just reading” and potentially going through what the different surfaces are
- Thinking through present/absent, manifest/latent, and surface/depth (4) alongside Best and Marcus
- What are the larger implications of this kind of approach? Do we resonate with the idea that we need “a new way of reading” (with all its polemical and moral imperative)? Thoughts in general?
- Thoughts about historical/presentist insistence on demystification? What I think was so odd about Bakhtin’s argument about poetry is its polemicized insistence on calling it monologic and *symbolic*. I think there’s still a substantial difference between his philosophical argument (...Marxism??) and the task that Best and Marcus are advocating for, but maybe we look more closely at this momentum?
 - (Also, Professor Buurma contextualized this is a reaction against poststructuralism if I remember correctly, which is very latent in Bakhtin I think, so there’s that...)
- “In closing, we want to underscore two points: that to see more clearly does not require that we plumb hidden depths and that producing accurate accounts of surfaces is not antithetical to critique; indeed, it may be, as Bruno Latour has recently suggested, the best way to move past the impasses created by what has become an excessive emphasis on ideological demystification.” (18)
 - admirable “in theory” ... do we have doubts?

As a Segway into *Villette*

Representations, Narration, Interiority, Things we’ve been grappling with...

- Keton does some fun things with Beck and Marcus, Cohn, and Cohen
- What do we think of French in *Villette* and of Cohen’s argument about French in *Villette*? In relation to Boone’s argument about Miller from last week?
- (Just for my clarification, this would be considered a surface reading?)

Passages and Questions to Consider

- Lucy's relationships with Ginevra and Polly!
- "rivalry" and "amity"
- Desire and sexuality: Boone's argument about Dr. John vs the M. Paul? Marcus's (or our own Marcus-ian) reading?
- Marriage plot in *Villette*?
- Laura: "**Either way, I'm not quite satisfied.** For one thing, the process that Marcus shows in other novels to be allowed by female friendship *still happens Villette*. Lucy and M. Paul develop a companionate relationship intended to lead to marriage. Lucy declares her love for M. Paul - not just *without* female friendship but as a direct result of female antagonism."
- My variation of similar doubts: What do we make of *M. Paul's* 'promise of chastity' and the Protestant/Catholic dynamic?
- The experience of reading the scene where Lucy wanders into the park? The celebration of independence as a backdrop to this?
- M. Paul gives Lucy a house and a new set of friends (M. Milet), she inhabits new spaces? Companionate? Possibly 'erotic' or at the very least gendered understanding of how Lucy moves through the world?
- Sagnik is interested in revisiting the play scene! (As am I)
- Laura is interested in talking about the additional narrative detail we were given about Miss Marchmont and (I'm assuming) the hundred pounds Lucy receives at the end as a plot tie to the 'frame story'
- Looking at all the characters who Lucy is set against:
 - Ginevra on the stage
 - Polly both in childhood and in adulthood (and likewise her marriage with Dr. John as contrasting to Lucy's own marriage(!?) with M. Paul
 - Madame Beck as romantic rival
 - Miss Marchmont as foreshadowing Lucy's own fate?
 - Madame Walravens as this incredible caricature and odd character?
- the NUN. Is this parody? Real effect? A moment of real resistance? Are we guilty of symptomatic reading?